Love Troubles

Story: Love Troubles
Storylink: https://www.fanfiction.net/s/10250430/1/
Category: Kill la Kill/ キルラキル
Genre: Humor/Drama
Author: Falkrem
Authorlink: https://www.fanfiction.net/u/3657319/
Last updated: 04/21/2014
Words: 10751
Rating: T
Status: Complete
Content: Chapter 1 to 7 of 7 chapters
Source: FanFiction.net

Summary: Aikurou begins working under Dr. Mankanshoku as a pain therapist for his unfortunate patients. Now living under the same roof as Ryuuko, the two piece together their feelings for each other. Unfortunately, Ryuuko's not well versed when it comes to matters of the heart. Mikiryu. Slight Iramako, Sanasatsu, Inuja and OOCness(?).

Chapter 1: Mis(s) Fortune

A/N: As you probably know, I have a habit of elongating Aikurou and Ryuuko's names. Throughout this story, it seems that I've made Ryuuko rather antagonistic toward Aikurou, and I apologize for doing so. This is my first attempt at 'humor' and I have no idea what I've gotten myself into. /sweats nervously

Please note that there will be nonsensical plot devices and overblown character personalities. It gets more dramatic as the story progresses. The title is based on Aikurou's name: by switching the last two kanji for others with the same pronunciation, his name could mean 'love' ('Ai') and 'troubles/hardships' ('Kurou'). This also provides an interesting double meaning in English, but I've kept you reading this A/N for too long.

Also, this was written long before the release of Episode 25.

"I'll get it!"

Rapt knocking at the door was all it took for Ryuuko to zoom over and open it. She wanted to make herself as useful to the family as she could; that was why she volunteered for groceries, picked up some tricks from a masseuse and even learned how to cook from Mrs. Mankanshoku.

She was not pleased with the person at the door: ruffled blue hair, loosened tie around the neck of his dress shirt. Hunched over, with shades obscuring light blue eyes. He adjusted his shades as if he couldn't see properly.

"Ah, Ryuuko. How ar–"

Instantly, she slammed the door in his face.

Sukuyo poked her head out from the kitchen. "Ryuuko, who was that?"

"No one!" she called out, but Aikurou peered through the window, his presence unmistakable.

Sukuyo nearly swooned, "oh, Ryuuko, why don't you let Mikisugi in?"–earning a groan from the dark-haired girl.

Before she knew it, Aikurou was sitting with the Mankanshoku family at *their* kotatsu, eating *their* food, conversing with *her* family. *Why was he even here?* He should be at his own apartment and eating his own food like the crazy fool that he was!

She resolved to remain silent unless spoken to and refused to give any response or attention to her former homeroom teacher, avoiding his questions by turning to someone else and changing the subject. It became evident that Ryuuko, even a year after Nudist Beach's dissolution, did not like this man.

She had no reason to dislike him, but there was something about this Nudist that caused her to react so strongly to him–was it his hair? His smirk? His habit of flaunting a well-built body? Ryuuko's face almost reddened at the last thought, then she remembered that she was among family and…her teacher.

Throughout her last year at Honnouji Academy, she couldn't quite place her finger on what exactly it was that annoyed her about this man–then she graduated, and hadn't seen him since she left the halls of the Academy. She thought it'd be the last time they'd meet.

The topic switched specifically to Aikurou and there was no way Ryuuko could avoid hearing about his recent whereabouts. He prattled on in his elderly voice about the landlady kicking him out of his apartment for not paying his dues and that he'd been traveling through the streets of the city lost and alone.

"Dr. Mankanshoku, I was wondering if you could give me a job. I decided I'm going to quit teaching at Honnouji Academy this year and work elsewhere for my retirement. Unfortunately, I have no pension due to living on…well, a teacher's salary."

Everyone knew this was bullshit, but Sukuyo nodded on with teary eyes, Mako and Matarou listened intently, and Barazou put on a face of deep contemplation. Finally, Dr. Mankanshoku slammed a fist onto the kotatsu, bowls startled by the impact. "Alright! Since you're a *valued friend* of this family," Ryuuko grimaced as he said this, "it's only natural that we'd help you in your time of need!"

Ryuuko nearly smashed her head into the kotatsu with a groan, realizing that her exhibitionist of a teacher was going to be living under the same roof as her.

Thus, Aikurou Mikisugi began working for Dr. Mankanshoku, making Ryuuko's life more miserable than it had ever been before.

"Saa, my back and shoulders have been killing me the past few days."

Ryuuko, holding a half-folded shirt in one hand, scoffed at the blue-haired man. As if to emphasize his pain, he delicately placed a hand over his left shoulder. She didn't buy any of it.

"Well, it wouldn't be a problem if you'd stop stooping over all the time."

She knew–under those mysterious shades–a young and attractive man shied away from the outside world. This glamorous man held no qualms against showing off his body whenever he was near Ryuuko. So why the fragile old man act?

Sukuyo hesitated with a pair of Matarou's shorts. She tilted her head, retaining her thoughtful smile, before looking over at her adopted daughter.

"Ryuuko, why don't you give Mikisugi a massage?"

Her daughter tensed; exactly the reaction Ryuuko's seemingly oblivious mother expected. Sukuyo continued.

"You're the best hands the Makanshoku household has got, after all!"

Ryuuko flushed at the compliment, turning her head away. Even after living with the Mankanshoku family for over a year, there were a few things that still took Ryuuko aback. Earning a compliment from anyone in the household, especially Mrs. Mankanshoku, made Ryuuko grin with pride but blush like a schoolgirl.

Aikurou accepted Sukuyo's offer and Ryuuko sighed as they moved to the main room, Sukuyo continuing to fold clothes in their small laundry room. Ryuuko allowed the blue-haired man to settle himself in front of her. They had no couch, so Ryuuko had to make do with sitting on her knees, crossing her ankles to give herself more height. She hadn't realized he was so tall!

He sat there, cross-legged, back facing her. She wondered what it would be like to hug him without warning, especially at this distance. Cologne reached her nose, and she let out a small sneeze to the side. He chuckled.

"What's so funny, old man?"

"You just have the cutest sneeze."

His comment caused her cheeks to redden, thankful he couldn't see her face. She punched him lightly in the shoulder, startling him.

"Just stay quiet until I'm finished, got it?"

Aikurou simply turned his head and gave a silent nod, a small smile spreading across his lips. It aggravated her. She kneaded his shoulders, feeling the warmth of his skin beneath his dress shirt. She felt the simple material of the shirt between her fingers, rubbing softly.

Ryuuko was surprised he obeyed her.

"You have soft hands," he began, causing her face to flush, "despite being a delinquent." The look on her face turned bland, Aikurou oblivious. She ignored him and continued the massage.

The dark-haired girl wondered how his skin really felt. Brushing his hair of the way, she rubbed her thumbs against the base of his neck, his skin smooth yet soft. She could feel his shoulders relax and examined the smoothness of his shoulder blades, the muscles of his arms and back.

Then she realized what was really happening.

She got up abruptly–he fell over backwards, startled, his unbuttoned shirt flying with him. Her entire face was a bright shade of pink.

"Stop taking your clothes off around me, you pervert!"

Chapter 2: Gnats: Indifferent Diffidence

A/N: Shouldn't Ryuuko be worrying about child protection services instead of Aikurou's magnetic attraction? I kind of based the golden-haired woman on Con Pota's Panty (who, in turn, is based on THE Panty) on Pixiv, but not really because I needed a reason for Aikurou to go out. Honestly, was Ryuuko really the only one to believe Aikurou's story in the previous chapter?

She hadn't noticed before, but there was an unusual number of women arriving at the clinic lately. At first, she thought there was a rise in accidents in Blind Alley, issuing in the influx of patients. The longer she observed, however, she discovered that the ratio of women to men had a larger gap than she'd expected.

Outside snickering indicated that a certain younger brother was up to something. She set the knife aside, hesitated, and took it back, thinking it would do more for her purposes than sitting lamely beside unfinished carrots. Ryuuko untied the Sukuyo-styled bun her hair was in–not bothering to brush it–and located Matarou's hiding place.

He only noticed the overpowering aura when a shadow loomed over him, the sense of dread making his knees weak as he slowly turned to face this creature. He nearly died of a heart attack.

"S-Sadako!" he screamed, falling over backwards, scrambled uselessly around Ryuuko, and getting restrained with her other hand.

"Matarou, why are there so many patients at the clinic now?" She blew her hair out of her face. Ryuuko hoped Aikurou hadn't *shed* his disguise in front of Blind Alley already; she didn't want his peculiar ways gathering unwanted attention.

"Uh, Mikisugi, of course."

Her eyes widened in horror, wondering if the man was running through town in his birthday suit.

"Word, uh, may have gotten around the Alley that there was a good-looking, young man working for my dad. Not that I had anything to do with it," he stammered, held aloft by Ryuuko grasping him by the back of the collar.

Annoyed, she dragged a struggling Matarou over to the side-room-turned-clinic, weaving through the crowd of women itching to see this 'good-looking, young man'. She found Aikurou as he finished removing the acupuncture needles from a patient; he was in his usual old man appearance. Ryuuko wondered how patients hadn't already revealed the 'good-looking, young man' to be a hunched over, unofficially retired high school teacher.

"Busy, huh?" she remarked, keeping the squirming Matarou by her side. However, Aikurou seemed distressed, perhaps overloaded from the number of patients he had to 'help' today.

"Oh dear…it seems I'm quite popular, now."

She flung Matarou toward him, the blue-haired man sidestepping the child projectile. "Apologize, Matarou," she demanded as the boy recovered from his landing, "and tell the rest of the patients that the clinic is closed for the day!"

"I'm sorry," the boy begged, his head nearly hitting the floor as he rushed to apologize, "I just wanted to score some quick cash!"

"No, it's fine. I'm getting a lot accomplished, anyways," the former teacher responded humbly.

This annoyed Ryuuko further.

"You're not supposed to say 'it's fine'! He tried to use you to get money!"

"Calm down, Matoi," the blue-haired man warned, staring straight into her eyes. Her face flushed, and she ignored Matarou's clumsy escape.

"Petty stuff like this irritates the hell out of me," she explained, avoiding his gaze. The edge of his mouth twisted into a small smile.

"That was rather nice of you, Ryuuko."

She snapped her head up.

"I didn't do it for you!" Her voice lowered to a whisper. "I just thought it'd be annoying having this many customers around."

He took a few steps toward her, she tensed as the distance between them shrank. She didn't like the smirk on his face. He leaned over, his face inches away from hers.

"Would you prefer us alone, like right now?"

"Wh-wh-what?! Shut up, old man!" she yelled, backing out of the room and running as if her life depended on it.

He sighed, slipping off his shades. He wondered when her distaste for him began, but recalled nothing.

Back in front of the kitchen counter, Ryuuko rapidly chopped the carrots in a frenzy, nearly removing her fingers in the process.

The next day, Aikurou barely withstood the pressure of Ryuuko glowering at him, arms crossed, in the corner by the doctor's broken desk. On this very day, one of the patients happened to be a pretty young woman, her golden hair swishing and swaying as she walked.

After having the acupuncture needles removed, the woman sat on the 'operating' table as if they had all the time in the world. She pestered Aikurou with questions and fake compliments, and his humbleness aggravated Ryuuko.

"Despite the messy hair, you're a rather handsome man."

"On the contrary, I'm not handsome at all." Ryuuko grimaced, knowing the truth.

"I'd heard there was an attractive bachelor working here. Would that be you?"

"I think you have the wrong person. I'm just an old man." *You liar!* Ryuuko silently accused him.

"Is she your assistant?" the woman asked, finally turning her attention to the girl in the corner.

"Well, she's more of a…supervisor, I'd say."

"In that case, I'm sure you and I could work out a date around your schedule."

"I'm rather busy for the next week or so…" Aikurou nervously placed a hand behind his head, considering his options. Then, he sighed and said something that surprised Ryuuko.

"Excuse me, Matoi. I was wondering if you'd give me some time off this Saturday. Please."

NO, she thought as she glared at him–but she couldn't force him to work for the rest of his life. She just didn't want him to go about his free time *this way*.

"Hmph," she relented, looking away, "I guess you need a break every once in a while."

A sly grin made its way onto the blonde woman's face. Aikurou, however, seemed slightly concerned. This wasn't the reaction he expected at all.

"But remember that you aren't getting paid for Saturday!" Ryuuko told him, wanting to reign in the situation. She wasn't going to let him get away with this.

"I understand."

Keeping the cell phone close to her ear, Ryuuko waited for the person on the other end to respond. She *definitely* wasn't going to let him get away with this. Her call was answered by Soroi, whom immediately handed the receiver to his liege.

"Satsuki speaking," an authoritative voice answered.

"It's Ryuuko. I need you to help me out," whispered the younger sister into the phone; it was Friday night, a day after the date was planned by Aikurou and that blonde woman. She couldn't even remember if the woman told them her name.

"It's been a while, sis. You should call more often."

Her sister's words filled her with guilt. She couldn't call Satsuki due to Aikurou being an extreme distraction after he began work. She apologized profusely to her sister, then cut to the chase.

"Mikisugi's going on a date tomorrow and I need someone to back me up."

"Mikisugi? Why are you so concerned about him?" Satsuki crossed and uncrossed her legs, watching the tea's steam wisp upward and disappear.

Ryuuko's face turned red, glad that her sister couldn't see. She made sure no one in their household would walk in on her conversation with Satsuki–she'd hidden herself quite well in the closet. Unless Sukuyo decided to put back finished laundry (and probably lose a few years of her life) Ryuuko was safe from prying ears.

"I'm not! I just can't have our pain therapist running around when he's supposed to be working!"

"Pain therapist?" This was new. "Well, that explains why he resigned from teaching. I offered to pay him generously for his work, but he rejected the offer. Too bad, as I was going to let him live in the three-star district as well."

Ryuuko sputtered.

"That lying old man!"

"Did Mikisugi say something?"

"N-no…Anyways, I want you to meet me by the coffee shop on Second Street," Ryuuko told her sister hurriedly. Sukuyo entered the room with a basket of clean clothes.

"Wait–" Satsuki heard the line die. A small smile spread across her lips. Her sister's antics amused her to no end.

Chapter 3: Admonish, Astonish

A/N: First of all, thank you for your reviews; they keep me motivated to continue this story and Ryuuko and Aikurou's ridiculous interactions.

Mako and Ira are engaged but I have no idea how to sneak that into previous chapters so here you go. Engaged couples are allowed to go on dates before the wedding, right? Right?!

A continuation of the date scene. I have a headcanon that Mako loves food. This chapter is particularly longer than the previous chapters due to the request made by ClearImages–I hadn't thought of adding Mako, Satsuki, and Ryuuko's antics until you mentioned them appearing, and one thing led to another…

"My, someone's looking fine today."

His date wore a short but revealing skirt, frilled blouse, and slung a purse across her left shoulder; opposite, Aikurou wore his usual dress shirt and pants (Ryuuko was certain he had five sets back home) accompanied by his trademark loosened tie. The woman was surprised to see Aikurou without his shades today–he had remarkably blue eyes and his hair was parted on his right, the overall look drawing the attention of nearby passerby. Actually, the couple drew the attention of everyone in their vicinity; beauty radiated from them in such a clichéd *kira kira* way.

"She pulls off that skirt better than I would," Satsuki murmured, crouching behind the trimmed bush beside with her sister. Ryuuko shook with a feeling she couldn't understand, her eyes burning daggers into Aikurou.

She wanted to run out and punch his pretty face–but no, that would give away her position, and this mission had to be discreet.

Familiar voices came their way. Ryuuko groaned. She didn't want to deal with the Elite Four right now.

"Man, I didn't think our afternoon would be filled with boredom," Uzu sighed, hands behind his head.

"You shouldn't say that; we're here to support him," Houka reminded him, clipboard currently accessing the best dating hotspots in town. He made sure they had something to fall back on.

"Ooh, perhaps the Northern Monkey is jealous he doesn't have a girlfriend," Nonon said, grinning.

"Shut up!" Uzu yelled at the girl.

"Is that Lady Satsuki?" the blue-haired boy pointed out.

"What, where?!"

Satsuki turned to face them, a look of discontent, silencing the group.

"It appears they are in stealth mode," remarked Houka.

"Well, that isn't what I'd call *stealthy*," Nonon muttered.

"Why are you here?!" hissed Ryuuko, earning a look of disapproval from the pink-haired girl.

Uzu crouched beside them; the other two followed suit. There were only so many people that bush could hide.

"We're watching over Ira, making sure he doesn't screw up his date with Mako," Uzu informed the sisters in a hushed tone.

Ryuuko cursed herself for putting Aikurou's date on the same day as her friend's. Quickly she rolled over to the next bush, the others following her. "You're getting dirt on my hat, Matoi!" Nonon complained, but Houka gave her a look that shut her mouth.

After five minutes of staring at the former teacher and his date, Nonon huffed and said, "well, that's all I'm staying for. You guys can keep watching paint dry."

She got up, and Houka did so as well. He apologized for their "leaving prematurely", and stated that Nonon and himself would give them their spiritual support. The two walked off, Nonon's arm in his.

At that moment, Ryuuko's problems got worse.

Exiting a nearby floral shop, a brown-haired girl noticed her friend's *subtle* hiding place. Ryuuko felt the energy before she saw it.

"Ryu–"

The dark-haired girl tackled Mako to the ground before the latter could do so herself. The two rolled away quite a distance, the intimidating Ira watching them in silence. He knelt beside Satsuki and Uzu; obviously the bush wasn't going to hide *him*.

"Lady Satsuki," he began, but Uzu filled him in on sparse details.

Ryuuko crept over to the bush and crouched down next to Satsuki, the younger sister's hair in disarray after escaping her best friend's vice-like grip; Mako followed her, still bubbling with excitement over seeing her adopted sister. Ryuuko hoped Aikurou or his date hadn't noticed the commotion–the next phase of their plan required delicacy and a bit of luck. Much to Ryuuko's relief and chagrin, neither target showed any indication of being disturbed from their date.

"Whatcha' guys doin'?" Mako whispered loudly–at least as loudly Ryuuko as allowed her to be before her mouth was covered by her best friend. Uzu repeated his briefing to the brown-haired girl as Satsuki and Ryuuko weaved through the bustling street to better examine the targeted couple.

"Ohhh, you're staking them out. Like spies!"

"I guess you could call it that," Uzu began uncertainly.

"I wanna' help!" Ira glanced at his fiancée warily, but said nothing. Mako's 'help' spelled disaster–and an extreme amount of casualties. Uzu accepted them into the team without another word.

Mako, Ira, and Uzu pursued the two sisters. Ryuuko gave a wide-eyed look when she saw her best friend, but Satsuki reassured her that Mako's skills could be utilized to their advantage. The younger sister worried about the 'skills' Satsuki mentioned.

Aikurou and the blonde-haired woman entered a nearby pastry shop, the group snaking around the patio tables and disturbed customers. After a small huddle, the team split into three separate groups: Uzu and Satsuki, Ira and Mako, and Ryuuko.

Mako surreptitiously grabbed a sundae when its owner wasn't looking, but Ira made her place it back after she took a quick bite. Uzu sneaked a glance at his crush's attire, then blushed when she turned her head to look at him, a playful smile on her face. Ryuuko focused her attention on the final part of the plan.

"Would you like some help with that?" Ira bellowed to a man carrying several crates of tomatoes. The tomato man cowered at the other man's stature, but wordlessly nodded and held up the crate as a peace-offering. Mako bounded up to the table, holding a list of fake groceries.

"Oh! Mikisugi, I didn't know you were here!" The brown-haired girl announced, signaling the next part of their plan. Aikurou simply smiled up at the girl, his date sized her up and, after a moment of silence, deemed the energetic girl harmless. Aikurou and his date were seated at an outside table for two, an umbrella shading them from the burning sun.

Uzu grabbed a nearby dessert–the same sundae Mako attempted to steal earlier–and made his way toward the server that had an identical sundae placed upon its tray. That particular server was making his way toward Aikurou's table; Satsuki made sure to keep tabs on the server assigned to their targets. Much to the duo's relief, the stolen sundae's owner took no notice.

Satsuki's partner handed the sundae to her. The girl grabbed a nearby container of iodized salt and sprinkled a questionable amount on the slightly melted ice cream. Satsuki then ran over to the server on his way to the couple, brushing past him and nearly spinning the silver platter out of his hands.

She let out a surprised "oh!" when the cup slid down the platter, Satsuki's hand saving the sundae from its demise. The silver platter clattered to the ground behind the server. Satsuki continued to apologize; the server continued to reassure her that everything was 'okay'. The server turned to grab the platter and the dark-haired girl hurriedly switched the two sundaes in her hands.

The server gripped the platter in one hand, thanked Satsuki for rescuing the sundae and got up with the salted sundae placed neatly on the platter. Satsuki smiled sweetly and swirled the spoon around in the cup in all innocence.

Meanwhile, a confused man inspected the nearby area for his missing dessert.

"Funny running into you today," Aikurou remarked to Mako, his date fidgeting nervously. Mako held her hands behind her back in a cutesy manner–on the inside, she silently anticipated Ryuuko finishing the last component of the plan.

"I was getting groceries for Mom," Mako told him, waving the paper list in the air in front of the couple. Aikurou smiled, adding a "how nice" and turned his attention back to his date. Mako stopped, a look of concern crossing her face–she needed to buy her best friend more time.

At that moment, an appetizing sundae arrived at their table. Mako sighed internally in relief, her face frozen in a wide smile before dashing away.

"Well, see ya'!" she called out, getting as far away from the scene as possible.

Ryuuko dodged a group of men and women as she ran into the flower shop, determined. Ira hid her from the couple's sight, carrying a crate of tomatoes. The owner stood at the counter, a smiling old man.

Uzu and Satsuki waited in anticipation as the woman scooped up a chunk of extremely salty ice cream. To the duo's horror, she offered the scoop to Aikurou, who took it willingly and accepted the scoop into his mouth. He quickly covered his mouth with a napkin, turning away, a surprised look on his face.

"What's wrong, Mikisugi?" her voice lilted through the air like fake strawberries.

He quietly spat the ice cream into the napkin, making sure his date couldn't see, and wiped his mouth with the folded napkin's dry side. It was the most disgusting scoop of ice cream he'd ever tasted. Salt enhanced sweetness, but this was too much salt!

The duo hiding behind the safety of the restaurant's glass windows snickered to themselves.

Mako bounded away backwards, keeping her eyes on Aikurou to make sure he didn't notice the urgent look in her eyes when she made her escape. Suddenly, she ran into a stack of nearby crates filled with pears, knocking them (and several unfortunate bystanders) over. She flew back, and Ira, fearing the worst, prematurely dropped his crates and dashed to his fiancée's rescue–the tomatoes in the bottom crates splattered as their containers collapsed to the ground.

Ryuuko was in the flower shop, trying to convince the owner that the buds were dry–in an attempt at stealing the hose and drenching the couple as the finale of their terrible makeshift plan. An increasingly mortified look crept across her face when she turned to see Aikurou looking directly at her, napkin in hand. The look on his face made her realize that he knew exactly why she was there; however, he had no idea that the dark-haired girl set up this plan with the others. Said plan had failed miserably.

She stomped outside in defeat. Ira ignored the fuming tomato owner and apologized to the people used as bowling pins by Mako's unpredictable fall. Mako shouted out her own apology to Ryuuko across the street, over the din of people screaming from Ira's abrupt sprint. Uzu and Satsuki realized their unfortunate failure when two shadows loomed over them; both the server and the restaurant manager had their arms crossed, the server giving the duo a grave stare.

Aikurou stood up, mimicked by his surprised date. The blonde-haired woman's eyes followed her date's gaze to his supervisor.

"I'm tired of things not working out!" Ryuuko yelled, grabbing a perfect tomato and aiming it at Aikurou's head. It didn't hit its mark.

"Did you plan this?" the blonde-haired woman accused Aikurou. Red dripped down the white of her blouse, her gold hair was soaked in tomato juice. The blue-haired man turned to face her, a straight look on his face. He was speechless.

"No, I had no idea this would happen." Aikurou's lips then twisted into a smile. Although he didn't want to admit it, his date looked hilarious with a tomato across her shoulder. He was definitely screwed.

A loud smack echoed across the street, several people staring at the source of the noise. Aikurou's cheek was red from the unforgiving slap she gave him.

"I NEVER want to see your *ridiculous* face EVER AGAIN!"

She scurried away, clutching her purse and avoiding the stares of passerby.

The sun was beginning to set as Aikurou and Ryuuko silently made their way home. Ira pulled Mako away from the wounded group, Uzu walked Satsuki back to her place.

Their silence was broken by the blue-haired man.

"Since when did you become an expert tomato thrower?" She hid her smirk.

"Since when did you have such a ridiculous face?" He feigned a hurt look.

"You don't think my face is ridiculous, do you?"

She paused for a few seconds, then shook her head.

"I like your face just the way it is," she muttered, cheeks reddening, "n-not that it isn't ridiculous!"

He raised an eyebrow, but remained taciturn. Then, he spoke.

"Thank you."

"T-that wasn't a compliment!" she defended herself, running into the house and ending their conversation. He sighed and ran a hand through his hair–he meant to thank her for saving him from his obnoxious date.

A small smile played across his lips.

Chapter 4: Out Liar

A/N: Ryuuko isn't always this caustic toward Uzu. She's just irritated by Aikurou's constant presence. I've been listening to too much Ee? Aa, Sou recently. I didn't mean for this chapter to be sad.

The next morning, Ryuuko received a call from a hyperventilating Uzu.

"What am I supposed to do?! She asked me out on a date, and I agreed!"

Well, that's your problem, Ryuuko wanted to reply, but settled for something more tact.

"She's quite the go-getter, isn't she?" Ryuuko muttered, but Uzu wasn't listening.

"I have to find something to wear that isn't athletic clothing!" She could hear the rustling and throwing of clothes through the phone.

"When is this date?"

"Friday," Uzu breathed at last, "but I have nothing to wear!"

Then just go in the nude. Another biting thought.

"Fine. I'll help you look for some clothes. I need a bridesmaid dress anyway," she told him, realizing that her friend's wedding was a month away. Better to look now than face regret later.

"Okay, I'll meet you at the department store," Uzu huffed, and abruptly hung up the phone.

Ryuuko sighed, sitting up against the wall. At least she wasn't hiding in the closet this time. Sukuyo nearly died, thinking her daughter to be some sort of closet kappa.

"Sooo, who's the lucky guy?" Matarou asked, entering the room, and grinning in a way that suggested information fodder for him to spread across town.

"No one!" Ryuuko told him, getting up and putting on her black and white jacket.

Making sure Matarou wasn't in earshot, Ryuuko yelled out to the clinic, "I'm going out with Sanageyama!" before leaving. Aikurou, in the midst of removing needles, cocked his head as if he had heard something strange.

"What about this one?" Uzu pulled out a dark green vest with white sleeves.

"Maybe something less nature-y."

"How about this?" He removed a black dress shirt from the rack, placing it in front of himself to simulate his wearing it.

"Do you always choose green or black?"

Uzu held the dress shirt to his chest protectively. "They're my favorite colors! Don't make fun of them!"

She laughed, a soft smile on her face. "I wasn't trying to. Now, let's try looking for something more date-like."

After finding Uzu suitable date attire, he, in exchange, helped Ryuuko look for a bridesmaid dress.

Several dresses later, Ryuuko sat exasperated in the chair next to the fitting rooms.

"The thing is, it's hard to find something that'll match your eyes *and* your hair," Uzu explained apologetically.

Ryuuko walked around the dresses hung up on racks. Several times. Nothing appealed to her, nor did anything match her eyes *or* her hair.

"Why not try this one?" Uzu suggested, finding a blue dress hidden by the others.

Ryuuko stared at it; the dress was pretty, but the red in her hair would stick out like a sore thumb. Then she realized, Uzu wasn't looking for something that would suit *her*. He was imagining Satsuki standing there. She huffed grumpily.

"I guess I'll take it," she muttered–it was better than nothing. Besides, maybe she could dye her hair or something.

"Great!" Uzu replied, oblivious to Ryuuko's dilemma.

The rest of the day was spent eating takoyaki and window shopping. They parted ways before reaching the clinic, leaving Ryuuko to finish the trek on her own. In front of the mirror, Ryuuko fitted the dress in front of her similar to Uzu's simulation.

"Looks cute, but it clashes with your hair," came a remark from the doorway behind her. She turned quickly, using the dress as a cover. Aikurou stood against the door frame, shades on, completely at ease.

"Pervert!" she accused him, immediately throwing him out of the room.

"I see you're wearing the same striped panties again," he remarked, wanting to get the last word.

She thought outside the room was too kind, and threw him out of the house.

It was several days after Ryuuko threw him out. After much groveling, and with the help of Sukuyo and Barazou, Aikurou was given a chance to sleep in the house again. As much as he enjoyed watching the sky transform, he preferred having a futon of his own.

He removed the needles from an elderly woman and placed them in the tray on top of the broken desk.

The woman turned toward him, "pardon me for asking, but are you alright? You seem preoccupied."

"Eh? No, I'm just a bit confused," he replied quietly.

After about a minute of silence, Aikurou, back turned, asked, "there's a woman I'm fond of."

The elderly woman chuckled, knowingly. "It's been years since I've been in love, and that was when my husband was alive."

"My condolences. I've seen many years myself, but I wouldn't say I'm 'in love'…"

She smiled sweetly. "It's alright to be modest. The best men are."

The woman continued, "you don't have to hide behind those shades all the time, young man. I'm sure the girl you're in love with would prefer to see your face. She must be beautiful if you can't fully concentrate on your work."

Aikurou was silent. He *had* been spacing out a bit recently. The woman took her leave, just as Sukuyo burst into the room.

"Mikisugi! Have you bought the groceries for tonight's dinner?"

Aikurou whipped his head around to look at the clock. '4:50′, it read. He cursed himself for forgetting the only task (aside from assisting Dr. Mankanshoku) the family gave him.

"Saa, I'm in big trouble now."

Before the family could go hungry, Aikurou returned home with several bags of food. Sukuyo was relieved and set about her job of making an incomprehensible meal. Ryuuko excused herself from the dinner again; she wasn't in the mood to tolerate the blue-haired man's presence.

Aikurou quickly excused himself as well, and upon sliding the door to the side room, grabbed a bag before heading outside.

"Ryuuko."

He walked over to her, keeping the bag by his side. She sat on a crate and stared at the sky. It was difficult seeing the stars when the one- and two-star districts drowned them out with neon lights.

"I told you not to call me that," she muttered, "only friends are allowed to call each other by first name."

He took a seat on the crate opposite her.

"Then, may I be your friend?"

"No!" was her instantaneous answer, but then she spotted the bag. "What's that for?"

"It's a gift," he explained, handing the bag over to her, "for you."

Opening up the bag, Ryuuko pulled out a dress, the red material reminding her of her days with Senketsu. She lowered her head and covered her mouth with her hand. She shook.

Hastily, she threw the dress back at him. "Bring it back to the store," she told him, voice choked, "I can't wear this."

Aikurou took the dress, remembering the short moment when her eyes lit up upon seeing the dress. It would be rude if she threw away Uzu's dress for this one.

"I understand."

A/N: Sometimes I interject Japanese words into my works.

kappa: Japanese version of a kelpie, roughly translates to 'river child'
takoyaki: grilled octopus balls
futon: bedding that can be folded and stored away

Chapter 5: Habitual Habitat

Chapter 6: Bitter Sweets

Chapter 7: Re: Solution